

[**cold as ice by pencilledhearts**](#)

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Summary:

Steve's having a terrible day at the end of a terrible week. What he doesn't expect is for Billy Hargrove to help him, let alone to end up understanding him a little better.

cold as ice

Author's Note:

This got away from me a little. I wanted it to be a little missing interaction between seasons 2 and 3 between Steve and Billy where they get to understand each other a little better. It turned into whatever this is. I hope you guys like it! As always, come chat with me in the comments :)

It's a Friday evening, the wind is howling and water drips relentlessly off Steve's hair and face, soaking his jumper and leaving him irritated. It's an awful day and awful weather and to be honest, he's not sure how it could get much worse.

Of course, that's the moment that he sees the closed sign on the door of the diner and the absence of any other cars in the parking lot.

"Fuck's sake," he groans. He stops in the middle of the lot and stares at the empty diner. Water continues to rain down from on high. His clothes stick to his skin, the swollen woollen sleeves of his jumper already stretching out of shape and probably ruined.

All he'd wanted was a greasy burger, a strong coffee and to sit by himself.

It's something he does, sometimes, when he's feeling down or lonely. When the house feels too big and empty, when he realises he's not heard a voice outside of school for days, or when the voices in his head get too loud and the ghost in the pool feels too real.

Steve kicks the ground, feels the vibrations in his leg and wonders what to do now.

He could go home, he supposes. Make his own coffee, sit in front of the TV and try to pass the time until tomorrow, when he can start the whole routine again. Maybe he could drive out to the quarry or the lake – but there's a chance that someone from school will be there. Having a party or having sex, either way, it'll just make him feel like

shit.

It feels like too much.

It had taken a lot of effort just to leave the house, to convince himself that he needed to do something other than stare at a blank wall and get drunk so the thought of going back to an empty house-

If he could describe it at all, he would say the thought feels *grey*.

So instead, he sits against the diner wall. He'll find the energy to move later but first, he can sit and feel the elements on his skin. Remind himself that he's alive. There's no shelter, but at least something to lean on. The rain isn't stopping, the wind isn't slowing and he's probably going to regret this tomorrow, but he closes his eyes and stays still.

It's nice, actually, to have the weather be so violent. It's distracting. It clouds his thoughts and stops him from hearing the echoes of his father's voice in his head, or the sight of Carol and Tommy staring at him from across the lunch hall. He can focus on the rush in his ears, the creaking of the diner sign and the sting of droplets on his face.

He doesn't remember dozing off - to be fair, he doesn't remember driving here either, just picking up the keys and then opening the door when he arrived, so that doesn't mean much - but when he opens his eyes next, it's dark. Evening twilight has given way to night. At first, he doesn't quite remember where is. It comes to him slowly – the answer message on the machine at home, his father's stern voice, the drive to the diner only for another crushing disappointment in a day that's been full of them.

"Piece of shit," someone says.

Steve rolls his head to the side. He can't see much, given there's no light source around, but now that he's focusing, he can hear someone nearby, their feet scuffing the tarmac.

"Who's there?" he slurs.

"The fuck?"

Steve blinks blearily. He should move, he thinks, in case this someone might mean him harm, but he doesn't have the energy.

“Is someone out here?” the voice says again.

It's a man's voice, deep and with an accent that's not from Hawkins. More footsteps; a moment later, twin beams light up the parking lot. Steve groans as he's temporarily blinded and turns his head away.

“Harrington?”

The man slams his car door shut and comes towards him; Steve can't make out any features through the blinding light, but he feels like he should recognise him anyway.

The person stops in front of him and prods him with his foot. Which, rude.

“Well ain't this a sad sight.”

A face appears right next to Steve's, inches away. He notices the mouth first; he recognises the sneer instantly.

Billy Hargrove.

“You should be a warning, Harrington. They should put your face on posters to show kids in assembly. This is the definition of peaked in high school.” Billy laughs.

Steve groans again. He can't think of a retort.

“God, you're pathetic.”

Billy moves away, still close but looking down at him. His hair is even curlier when it's wet which looks good, actually, and is unfair because Steve's hair is definitely ruined.

“Harrington?”

Steve should answer. He should have answered by now. Some quick jibe, a reference about how at least he *has* peaked and Billy never will. He can't get the words right, though, and they stick on his

tongue.

Someone pokes his cheek.

Billy. Billy is poking his cheek. He's up close again, right in Steve's personal space, which is definitely not okay.

“Fuck, you’re as cold as ice.”

“Willing to sacrifice our love,” Steve mumbles, because at last, he knows what words should follow.

“The fuck?” Billy asks.

“You never take advice,” Steve continues. He tries to hum the next bars of the song but fails miserably. It’s an older song, but it’s one he remembers from his childhood. It reminds him of Saturday afternoons with the radio on and his mom singing along from the kitchen. Which, now that he thinks about it, could have been a very passive-aggressive way of airing frustrations and was a sign of things to come.

It seems so long ago now.

“Harrington, you fucked or something? What did you take?”

“You m’dad?” Steve manages. He congratulates himself on finally saying something. He blinks, and then someone is forcefully stripping him from his jumper. He feels someone push his arms into a jacket.

“You’re such a goddamn princess,” Billy is saying. “You fucking useless piss-take of a human being. This is soaked. How long have you been out here?”

“You’re a princess,” Steve mumbles.

“Yeah? Well, only one of us has fucking hypothermia, dickhead.”

Huh.

Arms wrap around his shoulders and under his knees and a moment later, the ground disappears from underneath him. He hadn’t realised

how painful the wall and the tarmac had been on his back and legs, but now the pressure is gone, he can feel pinpricks of pain over most of his body.

“What’re you doing?”

“Stopping you from dying, asshole.”

A few moments later, Steve is deposited in the seat of a car. Billy shoves his limbs in and slams the door shut, reappearing a moment later, on the driver’s side of the car. He fiddles with the dials on the dash and shuts the headlights off, flicking the inner car lights on a moment later.

The way Steve is sat isn’t very comfy, so he shifts. His body doesn’t respond properly. He ends up listing to the side, over towards Billy which is definitely not where he wants to be, but he can’t stop it. Billy shoves him back onto his own seat with a grunt.

“No you don’t,” Billy says. “Don’t fall asleep.”

“M’not.”

“Damn right you’re not, I am not hauling your ass across town like a taxi service.”

“M’just close my eyes though.”

Billy punches his shoulder. It hurts, but not as much as it should.

“The fuck are you doing out here, Harrington? You trying to kill yourself?”

Steve shrugs. He tries to shrug, anyway. He’s not sure how well he manages. He should probably care more; more about how hard it is to think or talk or move, more about how he’s in a car with Billy Hargrove, more about how time seems to keep skipping.

“-swear to god, if you don’t answer me, I’m dropping you at the hospital. That what you want?”

It happened again. Billy is up in his face,

“No hospital,” Steve says.

“Thank fuck,” Billy breathes. Steve tries to focus on his face. He looks worried, almost. There’s a crease on his forehead. That could easily be anger, though. Anger would make more sense.

“What’re you doin’ here?” Steve asks. Speaking is hard – like he’s drunk too much. His lips and tongue aren’t communicating well enough and the words sound clumsy.

“I came here to get laid. What do you think?”

“Diner’s shut.”

“Yeah, I realised that when I found your sorry ass.”

Billy turns the ignition. The engine rumbles into life and the heat starts blasting. It’s a weird sensation on his skin. It doesn’t feel warm, exactly, but he *can* feel it.

Whatever. He’s never been good with words.

“What about you, asshole?”

“Wha’?”

“Keep up, Harrington, or I’ll start to think you’ve lost any intelligence you once had. Why are you here instead of cosying up to your fancy family?”

It’s a bit rich for Billy to talk to him about losing brain cells, Steve thinks, when he’s the reason that the headaches keep coming and going and he can’t read books for more than fifteen minutes at a time anymore. That seems like a lot of effort to say, though. “Didn’t wan’ be alone,” he says instead.

Billy looks at him but doesn’t say anything.

Steve doesn’t know what that means. He doesn’t know why Billy is here, either, or why he’s manhandled Steve into his car, or why he’s not more worried about it.

He should be worried. He should definitely be worried. The last time they were this close, Steve ended up in hospital. In fact, knowing he should be worried and yet not feeling it at the same time is kind of terrifying in its own right. A part of his brain, the one with the survival instinct, is screaming at him to start caring, to start running, but it's like it's shut away or on the other side of a window. He can hear it, but it's distant.

He distracts himself by paying attention to the tingling sensation in his feet and hands. He hadn't realised they were numb. Pins and needles are better than worrying about not worrying.

“M’I in your car?” Steve asks.

“No, you’re in my pool.”

“Fuck you.”

“What?”

“Fuck. You.” Steve enunciates as clearly as he can.

“Yeah, whatever. You’re in my car, Harrington. Keep up.”

Billy sighs loudly. He’s drumming his fingers on the steering wheel, Steve realises. He hadn’t noticed the steady thud-thud-thud before.

“You should talk,” he says abruptly. He must sense Steve’s confused frown because he doesn’t turn to look at him, but says, “So you don’t fall asleep. I heard that once, on the radio.”

“Wha’ if I don’ wan’ to??” Steve asks.

“I dump your sorry ass back outside and leave you here to freeze to death.” Bill looks him dead in the eye. He’s completely serious.

“Fuck you too.”

“Yeah, well, those are your options.”

The pins and needles in his skin are a lot more painful now. The heat is starting to work – he hadn’t realised how cold he was, before, but

now shivers start to wrack his body. Steve tries to stop them, to clench his fists so that his hands don't shake. He doesn't want to look weak in front of Billy, even if that ship has long since sailed.

"Wha' time is it?" he asks.

There's a pause while Billy looks at his watch. "Gone eleven. Your parents going to call the police if you're not back soon?"

Steve snorts. "They'd have to—" A shiver, a huge one that makes him hunch in on himself and his jaw clack shut, cuts him off. "They'd have to be here to know."

Billy grunts.

"I should go." Steve fumbles for the car door. He feels a jolt of fear when it won't open. Child lock, he realises.

"Nice try, pretty boy," Billy says lazily. "You're staying there until I've worked out if you need the hospital."

"Thought you were going to leave me to freeze to death?"

Billy shrugs. "Max would give me hell. 'Sides, I don't need Hopper on my ass."

Steve swears under his breath. He feels miserable. He's wet and cold and wearing Billy's clothes. He's locked in a car with him and he hasn't got a way of escaping. He's not sure he could, even if there was a way.

This is not looking good.

"I'm fine," he says around another shiver. "Let me go."

Billy shakes his head. The curls on his head bounce with the movement, a golden halo for the twisted king. "Come on, King Steve," he drawls. "Look around. Where are you going to go?"

"Home."

"You'd kill someone before you got there."

And maybe he's right. That doesn't mean he has to like it though.

They're both silent for a while. Twice, he sees Billy's fingers reach towards the dash to play some music and both times, he changes his mind at the last second. Steve can feel warmth coming back into his body, feels the pain of circulation coming back into his fingers and toes. The shivers get worse.

"What's a rich boy like you doing out here, anyway?" Billy says finally. "This place is a little cheap for you."

Steve resents that. "What would you know?" he retorts, glad that his voice is steadier than before.

Billy shrugs. "Just sayin'."

"Don't." Steve glares out of the window. It's stopped raining, he realises. There are no ripples in the puddles, no new tracks on the glass. "What's a popular guy like you doing out here on a Friday night? No dates? No parties?"

Back when he was popular, back when he'd cared, he never would have stayed in on a Friday night. There had been pool parties, campfires, and team gatherings. He'd lived for those events, for the attention people gave him and the bittersweet feeling of temporary love.

"I'm avoiding Kira," Billy says. "I fucked her and now she won't leave me alone."

Huh. That's more of an honest answer than Steve thought he'd get. "Rookie error," he says. "She just broke up with Justin who was her rebound for Damien. She's not gonna let up."

Billy looks at him in surprise. Steve refuses to meet his eyes and groans as he shivers again, another full body shake that practically rocks the car.

"But that's not why you're really here," he continues. "Cause Kira is on the volleyball team and every other Friday, they go to Caesars on Main Street for team bonding shit."

He doesn't know where this sudden bravery came from.

"Is that King Steve I'm hearing?" Billy asks with wonder. "I was beginning to think I'd never meet him again."

Steve shrugs. "You won't. He's gone."

There was a time, back before Nancy and before the Upside Down, where being King Steve had meant everything to him. The easy affection, the constant stream of people trying to befriend him, to date him, to be in his circle, had been something he craved. The polar opposite of everything he had at home.

Now, his home is even emptier but the friendships he's built through their shared trauma mean so much more than what he ever had before.

As he brings his knees closer to his chest to try and get warmer, he wonders what Billy's reason is, why someone who seems to hate everybody is so eager to have them at his beck and call. Why he's been needling Steve since the moment he stepped foot in town, as if he's somehow different to the rest of them.

"The old man was doing my head in," Billy says. He stretches languidly as he's relaxed but now that Steve's looking, there's a tightness in his face that belies his tension. "The idiots here never ID me, so."

"Henry's good for cigarettes, too," Steve says. "Give him some cash and he'll stock you up."

A strange look passes over Billy's face. He turns towards Steve more fully, angling his body so they're actually facing each other. "Huh."

Steve wishes he had a cigarette right now. Or a cup of coffee. Something to warm his hands up and take his mind off of whatever's happening. His body is slowly coming back to him, his limbs moving where he tells them too and the shivers only intermittently wracking his body.

He thinks this is the most civil conversation he's ever had with Billy Hargrove. Somehow, they haven't argued yet, Billy's only threatened

to leave him to die twice, and no one's thrown a punch.

"My dad's gone," Steve says, the words surprising himself. He doesn't know where they come from. "I haven't seen him in two years."

Billy barks a laugh. "Jesus, Harrington."

Maybe it's because he knows that they're never going to speak of this night again. There's no way that Billy will admit to looking after Steve, that he gave him his clothes so that he could warm up like a sort of Florence Nightingale, and there's no way that Steve will let anyone know that he almost died because he was so apathetic about living that he hadn't thought to move.

"My mom, too," he continues. "They left a note one night and - bam - they were gone."

"That's fucked." Billy actually sounds pleased about it, a note of macabre joy in his voice.

"I don't know if they care about me. I don't know if they'd know if I died."

"Is that why you were out here?" Billy asks. "Some fucked up way to grab attention?"

"Barbara Holland died in my pool," he says. "Sometimes, I feel her watching me."

"*You're* fucked," Billy says.

"Jonathon put me in hospital once." Now that Steve's started, he can't seem to stop. "Punched the living daylight out of me and he only stopped because the cops turned up. Now he's dating my girlfriend and I babysit his brother."

"You need a hospital."

"No." Steve grabs Billy's wrist, stops him from moving. "My dad used to hit me."

"Christ," Billy says, jerking his arm away.

“I didn’t know it was wrong,” Steve says. “It was never much and he always apologised. What’s a shove here or a slap there, you know?”

There’s something in the way that a muscle jumps in Billy’s jaw that makes Steve pause. For the first time since he’s known him, Billy Hargrove looks timid. He hadn’t even known that Billy knew *how* to look timid.

It’s like having someone rip a blindfold off. *Oh*, he thinks.

Billy watches Steve watching him and sneers. “You’re pathetic,” he says, but the words don’t hold the heat they usually do.

“Maybe.” Steve tilts his head back and looks up at the car ceiling, tracing creases in the fabric with his eyes.

The silence stretches between them and Steve knows it should feel more tense than it does. He knows that he should have kept his mouth shut, that the last thing he should have done was give Billy more weapons to use against him. But instead, he feels calmer than he does in weeks.

“You’re lucky yours is gone,” Billy says quietly. He doesn’t meet Steve’s eye.

“Maybe,” Steve says again.

He knows the weight of Billy’s words, of the admission he’s just given.

“Is Max-”

“She’s fine.”

“He doesn’t-”

“She’s *fine* .”

“She’d better be. If she’s not, I’ll-”

“What, hurt me?” Billy laughs again. “Get in line.”

Steve shakes his head. “I need to go home,” he says tiredly.

Billy turns off the child lock without even looking at him. Maybe he’s decided that Steve’s fine. Maybe he just wants to get away from the fucked up freak. “I’m following you back, gonna make sure you don’t kill anyone.”

Steve rolls his eyes.

The cold air hits him the moment he opens the car door and he’s shivering again before he knows it. His keys are still in his jeans pocket so he digs them out and stumbles blindly towards his car. When he sits down in the driver’s seat and slams the door shut behind him, the seat is cold.

It feels grey.

He pauses for a moment, staring at the Camaro and Billy’s blurred face from inside. Dustin would have a field day if he ever found out about this. Steve knows there would be a speech, maybe even some diagrams, and it would all lead to being told what an idiot he is.

‘Billy,’ he imagines Dustin saying. ‘Billy Hargrove. He almost killed you, what were you thinking?’

But Dustin is never going to know.

The thing is, Steve has realised over the years that there’s a fine line between monster and man. Sometimes, he’s not sure there’s even a line at all.

Humans are animals too and when cornered and frightened, they fight back.

He thinks of Jonathon, his weight holding Steve down as he swung punch after punch. He remembers Nancy pointing a gun in his face and telling him to leave before she shot him. He remembers Billy Hargrove’s expression when he saw Max in the window, the split second of panic and anger before he sent Steve sprawling.

Sometimes, the lines they draw in the sand mean nothing at all. Someone’s monster can be someone else’s saviour.

He starts the car and pulls out of the lot, watching in his mirrors as Billy echoes his movements. The whole drive home, he sticks to less than 30 mph, certain that he'll lose control if he goes any fast. He can practically feel Billy's irritation. He half expects to be rammed from behind as a warning. Instead, he pulls into his driveway without incident.

His knuckles are white when he lets go of the wheel. His hands tremble. The house stands before him, dark, quiet and empty. Grey.

He unlocks the door anyway. Before he closes it again, he turns and waves towards the road. Billy's still idling on the driveway, his face unreadable from this distance but still turned towards him. He watches Steve for a moment, then leans on his horn.

Maybe it's an acknowledgement of whatever the hell tonight was. Maybe it's a warning.

Whatever it is, Steve isn't worried. For the first time, he thinks he understands the beast that is Billy Hargrove.

It's not as terrifying as he thought it would be.